

Effective Public Relations Practice for SMEs In Developing Countries: A Case Study of Nigeria

by

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Declaration

Declaration I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Journalism & Public Relations, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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Abstract

SMEs are essential to the growth and development of nations. Compared to large enterprise, SMEs have unique public relations need. Though public relations tools remain the same globally, the practice vary from geographical location and culture. This study investigates if SMEs in Nigeria can raise their profile using public relations. The research questions addressed in this study are: a) Can Public Relations be used to raise the profile of SMEs in developing countries? b) Can SMEs adopt Public Relations Practices of Large Enterprises?

A mixed methods approach was applied in the study. To collect the data a self-administered questionnaire was used. This questionnaire was filled by SME owners/managers followed by interviews with journalist and public relations experts in Nigeria. The results from this research indicates that SMEs in developing counties as Nigeria can use public relations to raise their profile however there is need to educate SME owners on the function and importance of public relations. Furthermore, the unethical practice of paying for media coverage need to be investigated.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In modern society, Small-medium enterprises (SMEs) are essential to the economic growth of nations because they encourage innovation and reduce the unemployment. They can work outside of influential concepts, and exploit different opportunities including technological and commercial that have been ignored by the large-Scale Businesses. (Koster & Stel, 2014)

The Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria define small and medium enterprises base on employment rate and total assets excluding land and building. Small Enterprises are firms with above ten employees and total asset of between five million Naira and fifty million naira. Whereas, Medium scale enterprises have a workforce between 50 and 99 employees and total asset of between fifty million naira and five hundred million Naira. (SMEDAN, 2013)

According to Eurostat (2019), SMEs account for 97% of enterprises in Europe and contributes about 50% of GDP. In their study, “The Role of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Development”, Herr and Nettekoyen note that SMEs are essential to the economy of developing countries. They argue that SMEs can play a role in poverty alleviations in transitioning economies (Herr and Nettekoyen, 2017). In Nigeria, the Nigeria Bureau of Statistic (NBS) report indicates that SMEs account for 50% employment in the industrial sector and about 90% employments in the manufacturing sector. These SMEs contribute about 48% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The role SMEs play in transitioning economies like Nigeria is of critical importance, therefore, research must be done on how to further develop the sector. SMEs have attracted scholarly attention, nonetheless, research have concentrated on the management and entrepreneurship aspect of SMEs and less on public relations. Public relation strategies have been empirically examined in different organizational settings, yet the strategies of small business remain understudied. When it comes to public relations strategies in developing countries, the current literature is sparse.

Small and Medium Scale Enterprise are unique and have distinctive features that require public relations to follow specific procedures. Zerfass and Winkler (2016), argue that research on large scale enterprise strategy cannot be transferable to SMEs. Likewise, Soylu notes that

“SMEs also need public relation works to communicate and interact with their target groups. However, they were not able to use effective public relations as much as big scale businesses in the past.” (Soylu, 2018, pp. 35). Huang-Horowitz and Evans (2017) argue that in a ‘global village’, SMEs must redefine their identity and evaluate their communication strategy to be able to compete favourably. However, minimal information, if any, has been identified with regards to the guidelines for SME public relations practices.

This research aims to understand if SMEs in developing countries can use public relations to raise profile. The purpose is to investigate the public relations strategies and practices that make SMEs unique can help them grow in a competitive environment. This study will answer to main research questions: a) Can Public Relations be used to raise the profile of SMEs in developing countries? b) Can SMEs adopt Public Relations Practices of Large Enterprises? The research is of benefits to public relations practitioners and SMEs owners as it demonstrates effective use of public relations in developing countries and factors limiting the practice of public relations. It also demonstrated the strategies SMEs can use to raise their profile depending on their environment.

To explore the research question, the research used a mixed method approach combining the qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The survey research design was used in this study. To collect data, a questionnaire was specifically designed for SME owners to understand the position of public relations in SMEs and current public relations activities. Data was also collected through interview with public relations professionals and journalists.

The next chapter will discuss the relevant literature that analyses the concept of SMEs, SMEs public relations in developed countries and the public relations practices in Nigeria and discuss the gaps in exiting research. The third chapter will discuss the methodology used then the result from the research analysed. The fifth chapter discusses the key findings of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction:

The literature discussed and analysed in this chapter are authoritative and recent publications. All article used are peer reviewed, grey literature, and media articles. The review analyses existing research relating to public relations practices for SMEs. An analysis of the business environment SMEs operate is conducted in relations to the contexts of public relations practices in developing countries. The information for the review was gathered from online databases such as EBSCO, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, SAGE, the Griffith College Library, and Perlego.

The findings from the literature review is divided into segments; i) Concept of SMES, ii) The External Business Environment iii) SME public relations in developed economy, iv) Public relations practice in Nigeria.

2.2 Concept of SME

Literature has shown the importance of SMEs to the economic development of a nation, yet, no universal concept of small and medium-scale businesses appears to exist. Zhiri (2017) note that authors define SMEs base on different ideas ranging from the number of employees, assets, turnovers, and capital investment. The world bank (2013) postulates that an SME is defined base on standards in the country it operates not by characteristics or the limitations of the firm.

The Small and Medium Enterprise Development of Nigeria (SMEDAN) (2013) in its report, small and medium scale enterprises are defined base on employment rate and total assets excluding land and building. Small Enterprise Enterprises are defined as firms with above ten employees and total asset of between five million naira and fifty million naira. Whereas, Medium scale enterprises have a workforce between 50 and 99 employees and total asset of between fifty million naira and five hundred million naira. SMEDAN (2013) highlights that firms with assets of 7 million and have a workforce of 7 people or less, are considered as micro-enterprises and can be categories as SMEs. Micro-enterprises, according to SMEDAN, account for 99 percent of enterprises in Nigeria. This study, therefore, defines an SME as a

firm with a workforce with fewer than 50 employees and total assets between Five million naira to Five hundred million naira.

A report by the world bank (2019) shows that SMEs play vital economic roles in developing countries. SMEs are significant contributors to employment opportunities and economic development in transitioning economies, “Formal SMEs contribute up to 40% of national income (GDP) in emerging economies. In emerging markets, most formal jobs are generated by SMEs, which creates 7 out of 10 jobs” (World Bank, 2019).

The National Bureau of Statistic (NBS) report indicates that there are about 17.4 million in Nigeria, and these enterprises contribute over 48% of the country’s national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). SMEs in Nigeria dominates five major industries, that is, wholesale and retail trade, agriculture, manufacturing, food services, and accommodation. Telecommunication, information industry accounts for about 13 percent of SMEs in the country. The NBS report also shows that SME account for 50% of industrial employment and 90% employment in the manufacturing sector. New emerging SMEs include digital agricultural investment, such as FarmCrowdy and Agrobag.

Aminu and Sharif (2015) note that by using recycled by-products from large firms, SMEs in Nigeria provide industrial employment and contribute to the national output through tax payments. An example is the Cyrus45 company, the company uses old tyres sourced from incinerators and refuse centres and transforms them into decorative furniture. (Ikpoyi, 2018). A second example is the informal SME in Kogi state that turns waste like cassava peels to regular animal feeds to reduce poverty in the community (TAAT news, 2017).

The business environment and operation characterize SMEs. Eniola and Entebang (2015) note that part of the challenges SMEs in Nigeria face is inadequate financial support and challenging business environment. However, Soylu (2018) notes that another problem SMEs face is poor public relations practices, “The issues encountered by these businesses, notably in terms of financial resources, but also in terms of qualified personnel and management capacity make conducting public relation activities quite challenging for them” (Soylu, 2018, pp. 37).

2.2 The External Business Environment

The business environment of an organization can be classified into two different types, that is, the external business environment and the internal environment. According to Tobora (2014) the internal business environment of an SME consists of factors that can be easily controlled by the company. Tobora (2014) presented findings that showed unfavourable business environment in developing countries leads to the collapse of over 50% of SMEs.

There seems to be an unclear classification of the external business environment. According to Hoskisson and Hitt (2011) study, the external environment can be grouped under the industrial environment, competitive environment, and the general environment. The study explains that the external environment is that factors directly influences the decision of an organization and understanding the external business environment can enable an organization to compete favourably in a competitive market. Hoskisson and Hitt note that, "The greater a firm's capacity to favourably influence its industry environment, the greater the likelihood that the firm will earn above-average returns". (Hoskisson and Hitt, 2011, p. 37). The industry environment according to the study refer to the sociocultural, economic, physical, and demographic in its environment. Unlike Hoskisson and Hitt, in the study "Strategic management: Formulation, implementation and control", Pearce and Robinson (2011) grouped the external factors of a business environment under the remote environment, operating environment and the industrial environment.

Although classification of the external business environment differs according to scholars, there are several factors that are frequently referred to. Based on the objective of this study, the literature focused on factors that can affect the public relations practices of SMEs. The external business environment in this study is classified under: i) Socio-cultural environment ii) Political environment iii) Economic environment and iv) Technological environment.

2.2.1 Socio-cultural environment

The socio-cultural environment consists of factors such as the social and cultural system of the people. According to Ajayi, the socio-cultural environment is "primarily man created intangible elements which affect people's behaviour relationship, perception, their way of life, and their survival and existence." (Ajayi, 2016, pp. 161).

In Akpor-Robaro (2012) view, the combination of social system and culture are what forms the socio-cultural business environment. Akpor-Robaro suggests that socio-cultural business environment shape entrepreneur mindset and set the tone for their operations and strategies. The findings from Akpor-Robaro study indicates that the sociocultural environment has a huge effect on the market in which SMEs operate, as it influences business growth and entrepreneurial activity directly.

Lampadarios et al (2017) agrees with Akpor-Robaro (2012) when he writes “The sociocultural environment has a significant impact on the market SMEs operate in while it directly impacts upon business creation and entrepreneurial activity. Businesses are constituted by culture and social relations while human, social, and cultural capital are often antecedents to acquiring financial capital and other resources needed to start a business.” (Lampadarios et al, 2017, pp. 207).

In their study, Johnson et al. (2013), note that the sociocultural environment determines the operations and strategies of SMEs in Nigeria as owners embed their religious beliefs in their business and this forms their business ethics. Sometimes there might engage in praying and fasting in challenging period. Some Muslim business owners might not engage in activities such as piggery or brewery because of their religion. “Being a one-man business or at most three, SME businesses are tied to culture, tradition and religion as typified by owners’ orientations, values and personality” (Johnson et al, 2013, pp. 96). Johnson et al. theory could suggest that the socio-cultural environment of an SME could therefore determine if it engages in public relations. The environment could also determine what strategy the SME decides to use.

2.2.2 The Economic Environment

The economic environment has a significant impact on the performance of SMEs. This claim is substantially supported by the findings of Orugbu et al. (2017) study. The study identifies inflation and exchange rates, government tax revenue and interest rate as factors that have negative impacts on SMEs operation in Nigeria. However, corruption seems to be one of the major threats to the survival of SMEs in Nigeria. Transparency International (2019) report ranked the country as one of the most highly corrupt countries in the world. The report indicates that 44 percent of public service users had to pay bribe to access some services.

Insufficient financing of small and medium-sized enterprises is one of the key factors working against successful SMEs development. Abeh (2017) research suggests that the budgetary allocations set to assist in the growth and development of SMEs in Nigeria is insufficient. Low funding, business ethics and corruption remain areas of concern for SMEs in the country. Abeh suggest that there need to be significant change to the economy of the country to address these problems.

Awonyinfa (2020) report backs these arguments, the report shows that over 40 SMEs in Nigeria in 2020 had to close because of economic crisis, he describes the Nigerian economy as a “weak and sluggish economy”. Awonyinfa further states that another reason for the SMEs closure is the unpredictable government policies in the country.

2.2.3 Political Environment

According Ajayi (2016), the political environment is referring to the changing government policies. The political environment of the country possess a large risk to the growth of SMEs, “regulatory changes have the potential to promote or inhibit market competition, social risks often have political bases and responses and political mismanagement can turn natural or human-made events into catastrophes" (Ajayi, 2016, pp. 161).

Eniola and Enteborg (2015) observe that Nigeria has no definite policy for the SMEs sector, however, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) was established to help the growth of SMEs in the country. They argue that poor government policies are major challenge for the growth of SMEs, “The inability of government to execute favourable fiscal policies and policy inconsistencies has undermined the development of SMEs in Nigeria” (Eniola, Entebang, 2015, pp. 243). The findings from the Eniola and Entebang study suggests that SMEs in developing countries stem up as a necessity because of the rate of unemployment in the country. Example in Nigeria, according to the NBS (2018) report, Nigeria witnessed a 23.1 per cent rate of unemployment in 2018. The unemployment rate is believed to contribute to the growth and competition of small businesses companies in the country.

Ojeka (2011) notes that the tax policy in Nigeria is unfriendly to SMEs. SMEs are faced with challenges such as “high tax rates, multiple taxation, complex tax regulations and lack of proper enlightenment or education about tax related issues.” (Ojeka, 2011). According to Aminu and Shariff (2015), SMEs in Nigeria die because of poor government support policies. There are no government policies to promote the competitiveness of SMEs in the country.

Aminu and Shariff note that tax evasion and corruption are factors that affects the growth of SMEs in the country, as government policies somewhat neglect SMEs in the country and focus more on large corporations.

The insurgency rate in the country, such as, the Boko Haram crisis in North-eastern part of the country and persistent cases of kidnap in the Niger Delta have restricted the growth of SMEs in the country. This environment, in turn has created an unhealthy environment for SMEs and their consumer. (Abekh, 2017). Abekh (2017) explains that another political factor that affect SMEs are the high cost business registration, business permits and business licenses.

2.2.4 Technological Environment

The technological environment at which SMEs operate is also a determining factor to their growth. Recent study by Wetherly and Otter (2014), shown that investing in technology is a key to success for SMEs in different countries. The study shows that the inability to access new technology limits the growth and competencies of SMEs. Wetherly and Otter suggest that an important aspect of the technological environment is Information Communication Technologies (ICT). To achieve growth and competitiveness, ICT is an effective tool for use by SMEs. However, in the case of Nigeria, Afolayan et al. (2015) research shows that corruption is a factor limiting effective utilization of ICT by SMEs. Similarly, research by Olusola and Oluwaseun (2013) and Dzisi et al (2014) suggests Nigeria SMEs are falling behind practices of their counterparts in developed economy as SMEs owners are unable to invest in new technology.

In Abekh (2017) research on the challenges of SMEs in Nigeria, he identified poor infrastructural facilities and poverty level as hindrance to effective use of ICT by SMEs. "In Nigeria, a large number of the population live below the poverty line, as such, average middle-income SMEs cannot afford basic technological and communication gadgets. The cost of computer related gadgets in Nigeria is three times the monthly wage of average SMEs." (Abekh, 2017, pp. 283). These could account for the low rate integration of online business resources such as websites and emails with traditional means by some SMEs.

2.3 SME Public Relations in Developed Economy.

According to Freitag and Stokes (2009), Public relations practices vary by geographical location and from culture to culture. Their study suggests that public relations strategies of an

organization are set based on the environment it operates. This research supports Vercic et al. (2013) theory that public relations tools are the same in every environment, however, strategies and techniques differ “Public Relations has generic components that will work normatively in most if not all cultures and political systems of the world. However, the specific applications, the strategies, techniques, and practices of public relations will differ in each location” (Vercic et al, 2013, pp. 32).

Effective communication strategy is essential for SMEs survival in a competitive environment. However, there are little research focused on public relations strategy for SMEs. Scholars have placed more emphasis on the significance of Corporate Social Responsibility for SMEs. Zerfass and Winkler (2016) research study the SMEs communication strategy in Germany. The study showed that in most SMEs, communication is more of an informal activity. It is mostly regarded as the task of the owner instead of a qualified public relations strategist. Zerfass and Winkler findings shown that strategic communication activities of SMEs are characterized by; “Heterogeneity, spontaneity, absence of goal orientation, scarce resources and lack of measurement and evaluation and overall communication strategy is absent.” (Zerfass and Winkler, 2016, pp. 282). They suggest that SMEs use a dynamic communication strategy, and this will allow them to compete with larger enterprise.

In America, the U.S chamber of commerce published an article on the best public relations strategies for SMEs. In the article, SMEs are advised to sign up to community websites such as ‘Help a Reporter Out’ (HARO). A place where journalist post daily seeking for experts’ opinions on articles they are reporting on. The article recommend that SME’s submit their companies for awards such as the Forbes' "30 Under 30" list, and Glassdoor's "Best Places to Work”. SMEs also publish thought leadership content while engaging in online conversation about their industry online (US Chamber of Commerce, 2019).

Huang-Horowitz and Evans (2017) research on how SMEs in America are communicating their brand identity. The research highlighted that communication activities are more formal in larger SMEs than the smaller SMEs. They note that marketing activities are often confused with public relations activities. Public relations strategies such as cultural activities and sports sponsorships or charity initiatives are practice by SMEs. The study shows that part of the strategies employed by small enterprises was the repetition of company value and brand identity in all communication materials and all media relations activity.

In the research, “Dialogues with entrepreneurs in China: How start-up companies cultivate relationships with strategic publics”, Men et al. (2017), observed that most start-up SMEs in China rely heavily on using media to generate free publicity and awareness however, most of the start-ups are concerned about being exposed to competitors. Start-ups also employ strategies such as networking with relevant stakeholders, creating personal relationships with potential consumers and proactive communication with investors keeping them in the loop and updated.

The free use of media for public relations might not be the same in some countries. Soylu (2018) highlighted that SMEs public relations strategy in Turkey is evolving. SMEs use online media to enable two-way communication and this in turn increases customer satisfaction. Soylu study in the same line with Zerfass and Winkler (2016) notes that SMEs use public relations activities in an ad hoc manner instead of in a systematic and planned manner. A study by Ozkanal (2017) also shows that SMEs in Turkey do not perform adequate public relations activities and SMEs with communications unit, overlap public relations activities within the core of marketing.

In Ireland, the Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (ISME) report indicates that SMEs use Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a public relations strategy to develop goodwill between the business and their target market. The report showed that similar to large corporations, 92% of SMEs in Ireland also engage in CSR activities by voluntarily contributing to charities, waste reduction, and recycling programmes. According to the ISME (2015) survey, the main perceived benefit of SMEs of CSR is to improve company's reputation and giving the business a sense of purpose. Similarly, researchers as Lim and Greenwood (2017) believe that CSR initiatives help to bolster an organisation's reputation. Corporate Social Responsibility is defined by the World Bank as "the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development—working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve the quality of life, in ways that are both good for business and good for development." (Ward, 2004, p.3).

Aside from CSR, associations like ISME and Small Firms Association (SFA) in Ireland encourage members to raise their company's profile through networking, branding, social media engagement, interpersonal relationship, and trade fairs. ISME give member opportunities for

media tours and organize networking events for SMEs as public relations strategies to grow the SMEs profile. (ISME, 2020).

2.4 Public Relations Practice in Nigeria

Similar to developed economy, public relations is also important in developing countries like Nigeria. Sudhaman (2010) believes that the PR market in Nigeria has hit the skids and tools used are rather limited. The regulatory body, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), have not been able to handle the crisis. Public relations practice is regulated in Nigeria. The NIPR Practitioners Decree was established to determine the standard of practitioners in the country.

Molleda (2008) research shows that socio-cultural and economic environment of the country have made it difficult to develop effective public relations strategies. However, professionals have adopted strategies such as organizing seminars and conferences, educating organization management on importance of public relations, and exhibiting innovation or creativity to help handle socio-cultural challenges. Molleda (2008) further ascertain that the Nigeria's socioeconomic and political environment demands more efficient use of public relations in promoting development and enterprise. According Onabajo (2017) reports that effective public relations tools used in Nigeria includes, news releases, photography, feature articles, advertising, websites, publicity material, exhibition, video films, award programmes, workshops, and seminar.

Meanwhile, Okoli (2013) believes that the public relation strategies in Nigeria is that they are mostly propagandist in their approach. Okoli's research indicates that public relations activities in Nigeria are mostly political campaigns. Political public relations is "focused on creating and sustaining harmonious relations with government, its agencies, officials etc. Second, it is also assumed or hoped that government or its official, and agencies etc. employ public relations strategies, techniques and philosophies in relating with the citizens or other stakeholders to engender mutual understanding, goodwill, partnership and respect" (Princewell and Vincent, 2013, pp.1644). Basically, Princewell and Vincent are saying that political public relations is not only employed by political actors but also corporate organization lobbying in the interest of their organization.

In Nigeria, political public relations are commonly used by political parties, or political aspirate to win and sustain public empathy and acceptance. While researching on 'Public Relations,

Migration Issues and Inclusive Administration in Nigeria', Adama and Okechukwu (2019) explained that to enhance the chances of electoral victory in Nigeria, political candidates need ensure that public relations strategies are adequately employed because it boosts the chances of electoral victory. The study recommended the use of strategies such as symposia, workshops, and seminars by political actors to create awareness about their campaigns.

According to Oyesomu et al. (2016) study, political rally is the most used public relations strategy by political parties in Nigeria. It involves gathering the electorate in an area to listen to the speeches of candidates and party members. The messages from political rallies contains candidate's policy and the idea is to encourage electorates to electorate to vote for them. Oyesomi et al. (2016) argues that although rallies encourage one-way communication, it has the effect of two-way communication. The findings from the showed that citizens are not only aware of political rallies but make effort to attend to also attend these rallies. It is also indicated that participant in these rallies do also by attention to candidate manifestos and press releases before accepting a political party.

Suffice to say, in the Nigerian 2015 election, the All Progressive Party (APC) achieved public acceptance through political rallies. Aside from rallies, StateCraftInc (2015) report show that strategies used to ensure APC's victory in the 2015 Nigerian election includes speeches, community relations, social media interactions and tradeshowes. StateCraftInc case study reports also indicates the use of pseudo-events to drive media coverage. An example is an event where the presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari visited rural areas and the Internal Displaced People (IDP) camps to express sympathy.

In his thesis, 'A Comperative Rhetorical Analysis of Nigerian Presidential Election 2015: A Public Relations Approach', Terrang (2017) indicated that the APC party used two-way asymmetric communication model for its public relations campaign. The party maintain a high level of relationship with it public and used a rhetorical campaign slogan 'change' helped to ensure its victory in the elections. Terrang notes that the party had an all-inclusive campaign strategy, constantly interacting with its stakeholder, and opinion leaders.

During the 2019 general elections, the public confidence was undermined by the inconclusive elections in some states. Varjee et al. (2019) report suggests that the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) response was "lacklustre." Varjee et al. further note that the diversity of people in the country is also a hindrance to public relations in the country, "What might be

an acceptable public relations strategy in some parts of the country might have drawbacks elsewhere. As some respondents in Rivers State noted, INEC's "protect your vote" slogan was problematic in that state because some youth equate the word "protection" with violence." (Varjee et al. 2019, pp. 7). This study supports Varjee et al. claim as previously stated research such as Vercic et al. (2013) show that public relations strategies should differ base on cultural and political environment.

In the corporate setting, according to Akhigbe and Olokoyo (2019), public relations strategies are mostly used in large enterprises and international enterprises in Nigeria. They note that the large enterprises in the country primarily focus on corporate social responsibility to manage their reputation. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as an organization's contribution to the sustainability of the local community it operates. (Brown and Forster, 2013).

Ibrahim and Nguru (2018) note that the Shell public relations engagement during the Ogoni crisis was the window to the development of public relations in Nigeria. As a crisis management plan, Shell developed a public relations strategy focused on engaging with the media and Non-governmental organization. The aim of the campaign aimed at communicating the corporate identity change of the organization. It was tagged as the "New Shell", focused on a corporate identity change. The company's CSR activity was used as a crisis management tool, they donated to NGOs. Shell's campaign plan was to "buy-in to the complexity of the issue" (Lobber and Rowell, 2010). The campaign also used third party endorsement as a strategy.

Akhigbe and Olokoyo (2019) telecommunication companies in Nigeria, use public relation to grow using strategies such as CSR. An example is the MTN mobile company, which is argued to have used public relation to grow in Nigeria. When the company was opened, it launched a campaign with the slogan, 'Best Connection'. The campaign also included CSR activities in rural communities. The next campaign MTN was introduced to portray the company's values of integrity, leadership and the can-do spirit. A second example is the Glo telecommunication brand that used a documentary titled 'Turning dreams into reality' to launch its brand (Gidado, 2012). However, Akhigbe and Olokoyo argue that in a developing country like Nigeria, consumers are not concern with organizations that engage in CSR. Nigerian have

majority of its citizens falling within a low-income bracket, so they are willing to move to product with better prices rates.

Another study, by Ezeoha et al. (2018) research on CSR activities of large corporate focusing on Dangote Groups. Findings from the research shows that Dangote group engages in CSR activities such as flood relieve donation and focus on government deficit areas. An example is the donation of about 150 vehicles to the Nigerian police force. (The Vanguard, 2018)

The use of CSR as a public relations strategy is becoming more prevalent. Nevertheless, this strategy has been criticized by research as Oliver et al (2016). The findings from the research indicates that although large enterprises engage in CSR to demonstrate that they are socially responsible, such activities are not appreciated by the community. This is because of how the organization continue to exploit the local. Oliver et al note, “the benefits of the oil companies’ CSR/community development initiatives are perceived to be at a huge cost to the host communities. Their activities are therefore viewed as a curse rather than a blessing.” (Oliver et al. 2016).

From the literature, it is evidenced that public relation activities in Nigeria are primary focused on political relations and large enterprises. When it comes to SME public relation, the literature is sparse. The socio-cultural environment of an organization seems to be a major determining factor of its public relations practices. The most used strategy is the corporate social responsibility (CSR), organizing events, and branding.

2.6 Conclusion:

Small and medium enterprises represent 99% of firms in Nigeria. SMEs account for 50% of industrial employment and 90% employment in the manufacturing sector in turn reducing the unemployment and contributing to its Gross Domestic Products (GDP). The literature analysed the SME market in Nigeria and the external factors that influence its growth. Findings indicate that new SMEs are emerging however, limiting external factors such as government policies, insufficient finance, and the cultural factors that leads to their decline.

The research also looked at the public relations industry in developing countries and how techniques could be used in Nigeria. Although findings show that public relations strategies differ according to geographical and cultural environment, there is evidence that there are some public relations tools remain the same in every environment.

PR predominantly has been used in Nigeria for political endeavours. The research analysed the current public relations activities political actors and that of big businesses. There remains opportunity for SMEs to use PR to grow their businesses based on the activities of SMEs in other countries. The research looks at these tools and aims to establish their most appropriate use in the market.

The literature provides good overview on the public relations activities in developed economies as the example of America, Germany, and Ireland. It also provides an overview to the activities of large enterprises in Nigeria, however, when it comes to SMEs in developing countries the literature is sparse. This study will fill the gap in knowledge by effective strategies for SMEs for the growth of SMEs in developing countries. The outcome of the research will be beneficial to SMEs and to PR consultants in determining the right strategies for SMEs based in their environment.

This research aims to determine if public relations can be used to grow the SME market in Nigeria and whether the same strategies used by the big businesses can be adopted by SMEs. These questions are answered by interviewing professionals and surveying SME owners about their opinion.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this research is to explore the influence of public relations on the growth of the SMEs sector in Nigeria. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Can Public Relations be used to raise the profile of SMEs in developing countries?
2. Can SMEs adopt Public Relations Practices of Large Enterprises?

To answer the research questions, the mixed methods approach is used, integrating the qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The research tools used to collect data were survey questionnaire and interviews. This chapter discusses the research sample, research methods, research design, ethical issues, and limitation of the research.

3.2 Research Sample

Based on the research objective, the researcher uploaded a web-based questionnaire on Google form. A total number of 120 SMEs owners completed the questionnaire. The researcher held ten interviews, interviewing two journalists; from different media outlets: a newspaper reporter, and a radio reporter. Also, four public relations consultants and four public relations academics in Nigeria were interviewed.

The research used the snowball sampling technique to reach the interviewees. The snowball sampling technique is a process where samples are sourced through recommendations of experts or previous interviewees. (Naderifar et al. 2017). To get the most appropriate samples for this study, the researcher used this technique by acquiring recommendations from interviewees and public relations professionals.

3.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Research Method

Quantitative research collects numerical data to answer a given research question while the qualitative research method collects data from pictures, written records, interview, and observed behaviour. Several individuals, for instance, Christensen et al. (2015) and Walsh (2012), feel that the use only one of these methods often provides an incomplete picture of the subject being investigated.

Berger (2018) argues that quantitative research is too narrow, and its focus on numerical figures creates a risk for important issues to be overlooked. However, Brennen believes the strength of quantitative research is its authenticity as it deals with figures, "Because of the uses number to quantify data, quantitative research is considered more authentic, important, and scientific" (Brennen, 2017, p. 4). In contrast, qualitative research deals with interpretative data. The qualitative research method has the advantage of giving the researcher a broader picture of the research question. Henning et al. claim, "The most distinctive features of the qualitative research is that the approach allows you to identify issues from the perspective of your study participants and understand the meaning and interpretations that they give to behaviours, events and object" (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 10).

Walsh (2012) note that qualitative and quantitative research are not similar. One is not superior over the other, "the debate has been more about ideology and who is 'right' and who is 'wrong', based on a set of unquestioned beliefs and oversimplifications of the position of the 'other', rather than reasoned argument" (Walsh, 2012, p.10). Walsh argues that "Indeed there is the danger that in defending our entrenched positions we will be blind not only to other positions, but to the opportunity of developing new, hybrid and innovative approaches to research" (Walsh, 2012, p.10). Walsh is saying is that focusing solely on only one method by researchers is a threat to the development of new research methods.

Individuals such as Bolden and Moscarola (2011) and Newman and Hitchcock (2011) agree with Walsh's view. Bolden and Moscarola (2011) highlight that differentiating between qualitative and quantitative research limits the opportunity for new research methods to evolve.

Newman and Hitchcock (2011) claims that distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research method often impede research findings,

"Divisions between quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches are arguably reified more by a need to label approaches than by actual differences in purpose. Overemphasizing such differences can yield false notions such as qualitative studies cannot yield causal conclusions, quantitative work eschews exploratory analyses, triangulation is a qualitative technique, qualitative research does not use statistics, and so on". (Newman and Hitchcock 2011, p.393)

Therefore, this research will apply the mixed-method research to analyse the research topic objectively, that is, applying both quantitative and qualitative research method.

3.4 Mixed Methods Approach

The mixed-method approach is the used of both qualitative and quantitative research techniques in research. “Mixed methods research, which is described as combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a richer and deeper understanding of a problem, has become increasingly popular” (Yousef et al., 2018, p.1). The mixed-method research has continued to be an issue for debate within scholars. (Ostlund et al. 2011; Yousef et al. 2018; Morse and Niehaus, 2016).

The mixed-method technique is used for this research using the strength of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide balanced finding on the research area. Morse and Niehaus claim that “Mixed method designs are planned, rigorous, and although challenging to conduct-provide very strong, publishable findings” (Morse and Niehaus, 2016, p. 10). Yousef et al. (2018) support Morse and Niehaus’ claim in that the mixed method approach encourages cross-referencing, thus, producing a richer conclusion. The advantage of the mixed method research is that researchers can draw from the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data as Ostlund et al. claims that “Mixed methods research, where quantitative and qualitative methods are combined, is increasingly recognized as valuable because it can potentially capitalize on the respective strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches” (Ostlund et al. 2011)

The integration of quantitative and quantitative research techniques gives the researcher a clear understanding of the research topic. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) view the mixed method research as a threat to the advancement of social science research. However, other scholars have encouraged the use of mixed research method. Walsh (2012) argues that one method can result in subjective findings. Similarly, Yousef et al. (2018) claim that when it comes to research, words, and numbers function simultaneously.

“Defining quantitative research as a deductive approach using numbers, and qualitative research as an inductive approach using words misses the complexity of the relationship between numbers and words. Quality and quantity are inseparable attributes of any phenomenon” (Yousef et al., 2018, p.3).

Creswell et al. (2008) suggest that the most used is the sequential method. The sequential method is where the qualitative and quantitative are combined to describe and analyse outcomes while being entirely differentiable from each other. Likewise, Yousef et al. suggest that findings from quantitative and qualitative research, “qualitative and quantitative data are transformable. Meaning, such as that in constructs and assumptions, can lead to numbers. Conversely, numbers can be transformed to meanings when researchers interpret and verbalize quantitative findings” (Yousef et al., 2018, p.3). Using this design, the researcher used a survey research design using the self-administered questionnaire and interview to answer the study research questions.

3.5 Research Design

The survey research design was used in this study with a combination of questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was strictly for SME owners/managers. The researcher interviewed professionals to gather meaningful information.

3.5.1 Surveys

Survey research is defined by Check and Schutt as “the collection of information from sample of individuals through their responses to questions” (Check and Schutt, 2012, p.160). Fowler (2016) shares the same opinion on surveys. He states that “the purpose of survey is to produce statistics, that is, quantitative or numerical descriptions about some aspects of the study population” (Fowler, 2016, p.1). Fowler (2013) notes that surveys are commonly conducted by government and private organizations to check demographics and to determine how people feel about a product or situation. This method is often used in social research.

Data from surveys are collected through two methods, that is, interview and self-administered questionnaires. Survey interview could be either individual or group setting; phone or in-person. According to Berger (2018), survey interviews are different from in-depth interviews. Survey interviews are more structured than the in-depth interviews, “Survey interviews are structured so information can be obtained to make valid generalizations about the population being studied” (Berger, 2018, p. 189). The self-administered can be administered supervised either one on one or in a group administration. It can also be administered unsupervised; this is when the questionnaire is mail or administered online.

To answer the research question of this study, an analytical survey was used. A total of 120 SME owners/managers in Nigeria were surveyed using a questionnaire. The questionnaire

was unsupervised and distributed online using Google form. The objective was to explore the PR practices of SMEs and factors that limit the practice of public relations. Respondents were asked on how they use public relations to promote their businesses, the public relations tools they continuously use, and challenges they face in their public relations practices. An interview was conducted with a total of 10 respondents. Four PR experts and Four PR professors answered questions on how SMEs can handle the challenges stated by respondents in the questionnaire. Questions such as if the business environment affect SMEs public relations and whether SMEs can use the same PR strategies as large enterprises to favourably compete in the market, were also answered by interviewees. Two journalists were also interviewed, questions were asked on how SMEs could get more coverage in the media. Complete questions for the questionnaire and interviews can be seen in Appendix I and Appendix II, respectively.

3.5.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a research tool used to collect research worthy information from the sample by the researcher. According to Tharenou et al. (2007), a questionnaire is a cost-effective tool used for data collection. It can be administered be in person, or conducted online, via email or post.

The first data collection tool used in this research was the questionnaire. To gather appropriate and relevant data for this study, the questionnaire used was tested on 20 respondents. From the feedback, some questions were adjusted, added while some eliminated. The questions were written based on some findings from the literature review and the objective of the study.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. To ensure proper representation of the population, section A addressed demographic, and the second question was asked to confirm that respondents owned or managed an SME. The SME owners/managers proceeded to section B. The questions in section B had a combination of multiple choice, Likert scale and open questions. Open questions were formed to answer questions on the public relations practices of SMEs in Nigeria, it concentrated on respondents' use of public relations for the promotion of SMEs, the PR tools, strategies, limitations, and the use of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The key questions asked can be examined in Appendix I. The questionnaire had an initial total of 149 respondents; however, only 120 respondents

proceeded to the second section. The responses helped in designing follow-up questions that were asked in the interview.

Respondents for the questionnaire were selected at random. After uploading the question online, the researcher sent out the link to different SME communities on WhatsApp. The link was also sent to SMEs on social media through Instagram and Facebook. The questions asked in the questionnaire were geared towards understanding the position of public relations in SMEs and their current public relations activities.

3.5.4 Interviews

After analysing the result of the questionnaire, ten separate interviews were held. Interview allows the researcher to explore meanings, intentions and idea of the interviewees and help obtain detailed, rich explanatory depictions of certain research phenomena. (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). Berger (2018) notes that interviews help researcher to get back stories from responses, "Interviews are unique in allowing researchers to get inside the minds of people and to gain access to material of considerable importance." (Berger, 2018, p.125).

Based the purpose of this research, the semi-structured interview was used in a face-to-face setting on video calls using zoom. The face-to-face interview allowed for both verbal and non-communication as McIntosh and Morse (2015) note that, "The presence of the interviewer gives structure to the interview situation. Communication is optimized because both verbal and non-verbal communication is possible." (McIntosh and Morse, 2015, p.7).

The professionals were selected using a snowball sampling technique. Four PR consultants were selected for this survey based on their experience working with businesses. The participant with the least years of experience had eight years' experience working as a public relations consultant. The interviewees discussed on their experiences working with SMEs and Large enterprises and challenges of public relations practices in Nigeria. Also, four academics were interviewed. The academics were selected from third level institutions in Nigeria and were asked on effective public relations strategies for SMEs considering the environments and the challenges of SME.

A journalist from a broadcast media station and a second from a newspaper outlet in Nigeria were also interviewed. During the interview, the journalist discussed on how SMEs can earn media coverage and their experiences reporting on SMEs. The interviews were all semi-

structured interview and it allowed the researcher ask follow-up question aside from the prepared question and this allowed for an in-depth discussion of themes raised by interviewees. The prepared question served as primary guide to ensure that the main topics were well addressed. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed later. The interview questions for the consultants, academics and journalist can be reviewed in Appendix II and Appendix III, respectively.

Based on the timeframe of the research, each interviewee was given a three days ultimatum to respond with a time that works for them, however, because of their busy schedule some recommended participants declined the interview.

Given the long distance, the interview was conducted successfully using online video calls (zoom). All interviewees were emailed information sheets, consent form and an interview guide. Some interview required follow up during the analysis, this was done by phone call. Interviews lasted for 30 minutes or more in some cases, this allowed the researcher to further gauge the interviewee opinions by asking follow-up questions to terms that were unclear. As part of the interview, respondents were asked at least ten questions. Samples of the document can be reviewed in Appendix II, Appendix III, Appendix IV and Appendix V. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

3.6 Ethical Issues

The research involved participant interviews, and questionnaires. It was important for participate to thoroughly understand what the research is about and agreeing to participate was voluntary. Respondents signed a consent form and had the option to withdraw from the research at any point without questions. A sample of the consent form can be seen in Appendix IV.

The interviewees were assured that they would remain anonymous during the course of the research. It was ensured that no interviewee is identifiable in the findings, all quotes were anonymously presented. At the start of the interview, the researcher apprised interviewees about being recorded and these recordings were then transcribed. Participants were also informed that the recording and transcription would be securely stored and will be destroyed 24 months following the completion of the research.

The recording and transcription are accessible only to the researcher. Likewise, for the online questionnaire, respondents were informed about the research and asked for their consent before completing the survey.

3.7 Limitations

As any research, this research had some limitations. Some of the challenges identified includes the data collection tools, respondent's participation and the timeframe of the study. One challenge with questionnaire according to Berger (2018) is the test of validity and reliability. Likewise, Ponto (2015) note that a major problem with survey research is measure error, "questions/instruments do not accurately reflect the topic of interests, questionnaires/interviews do not evoke truthful answers" (Ponto, 2015, p. 169). To manage this challenge, the research questionnaire was tested on 20 anonymous respondents and questions were adjusted, rewritten, while some parts eliminated.

Another challenge the sample size. 10 interviews were held with professionals and 120 SME owners took part in the online survey. Respondents provided substantial information that helped answer the study research questions nevertheless conducting more interviews with professionals and having a focus group with SME owners could have been more beneficial. The timeframe of the research was considered. With a longer period, the challenges would have been minimised, and there would have been more interviews, and a focus group would have been conducted before designing a survey for more SME owners.

3.8 Conclusion

To summarize, the primary objective of the study was to determine the role of public relations in the growth of SMEs. This chapter analysed the research methods to be used in this survey. The study used mixed method research combining quantitative and qualitative research to answer the research questions. A survey research design was applied using a questionnaire and interviews for data collection. The researcher interviewed relevant PR professionals who work with SMEs in Nigeria and journalists. This allowed the researcher to gather professionals' opinions on the study. The researcher ensured that ethical concerns were addressed throughout the research. Some identifiable limitations of the study include the data collection tools, respondent's participation and the timeframe of the study. With an extended period, the challenges would have been minimised, and there would have been more interviews, and

a focus group would have been conducted before designing a survey for more SME owners. The next chapter presents the results of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview:

Using the methods discussed in chapter three, this chapter analyses the data collected from the mixed method research. To reiterate the research questions, the research is aimed at answering:

1. Can Public Relations used to raise the profile of SMEs in developing countries?
2. Can SMEs adopt the Public relations strategies of Large Enterprises?

A self-administered questionnaire was placed on google form. 149 respondents participated in total. However, only 120 respondents proceeded to the second sections of the questionnaire which was designed strictly for SME owners/managers. The results are expressed using pie charts. In addition, 10 separate interviews were held. Participates included 4 Public Relations Professors, 4 Public Relations academics and Two journalist. The result is analysed using thematic analysis.

4.2 Results and Findings

4.2.1 Overall Finding

The research findings showed findings validating the use of public relations for the growth of SMEs. The use of public relations by SMEs is instrumental to image building and breaking into the market. In the analysis of results, a few themes emerged. SME knowledge and orientation of public relation is low. Public relation is not seen as a tool for SMEs to grow. The results show that there appear to be unethical practices within professionals. Public relations practice is undermined by unscrupulous practises in the country.

There is some discrepancy in the strategies of large enterprises and that SMEs. Big businesses strategies are focus on maintaining reputation, whereas SMEs are more focused on image building. The environment SMEs operate to determine their public relations strategies and tools. Their financial strength limits SMEs public relations. The socio-cultural environment plays a role in public relations of SMEs. Public relations strategies such as networking, corporate social responsibility and community relations are themes that recur in the findings involving public relations strategies for SMEs.

4.2.2 Analysis

The data collected through interview were analysed using themes that occur within the questionnaire and interview data.

The interviewees were asked questions to answer the first research question of this study. All interviewees stressed the need for SMEs in developing countries to use public relations in order to raise the profile. In their responses, interviews explain the role public relation play in developing SMES.

Interviewee 4 articulated that public relations creates opportunity for two-way communication between SMEs and target audience, "SMEs need more than advert to be able to scale and grow the business. Advert might bring you business but after a while they go but with public relations you will win the people's trust. You will keep the people's trust, you will build public confidence and that is what is required for every business to thrive. If you have the public behind you, your business will grow. So, SMEs do not only need PR, but it is necessary for business to grow in Nigeria".

Some respondents made note that to compete favourably in the environment SMEs need public relations. Interviewee 8 paint a picture, "People ask what business makes the most lasting impression with customers, why do one business do better than another business and all this questions are answered simply by saying that Public relations play a major role in developing a business."

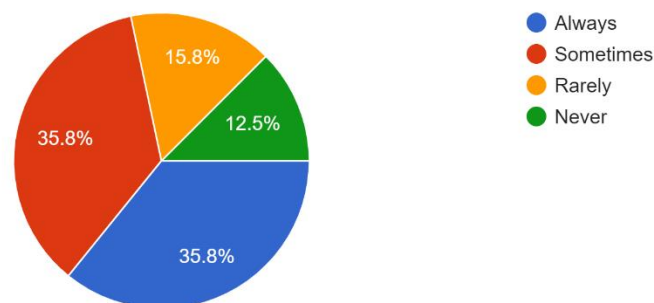
For SMEs to grow, there is need for consistence use of public relations, "If SMEs make effort to go by the ABCs of PR including involving media to the best of his/her capacity, it is going to play a role in promoting the business to a scale that is even not imagine by the owner." (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 7's assertion corresponds with Huang-Horowitz and Evans (2017) claim that small enterprises use strategic communication to build brand identity and organization values. "A lot of times people use PR especially when you're of media relations or getting your voice out there. PR can definitely be and should be used in SMEs."

Occasionally SMEs use public relation solely for crisis management, most respondents agree that public relation is more than just a crisis management tool, for example, interviewee 1 states, "Public relations goes beyond that, it is not there to solve problems it is there to ensure that problems do not arise within your organization. The more you are visible the more international clientele you will get. I believe Public relations is relevant to SMEs".

The public relations orientation of SMEs in Nigeria was identified through their answers on how often they use public relations. Respondents who answer that they do not use public relations were asked the reason why. From the result, 35.8% of the respondents answered Always to the use of public relation to promote their business, 35.8% of respondents answered sometimes, 15.8% rarely while 12.5% never use public relations to promote their business. This results in illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Use of Public Relations

How often do you use public relations to promote your business?
120 responses



Respondents were asked on why they do not use public relations as part of the business tool. Some responded:

“This is because most sales are moving online now so I can focus online ads and marketing instead.”

“PR, I believe is for very big brands with so many competitors”

“I use Social media platforms. It’s the new technology and it reaches the public faster.”

“There has been no need for it.”

“Because we are in the process of investing in corporate communications”

“I want to have distributors in every state first”

“They are not tech savvy”

Although no interviewee was asked about the orientation of SMEs, most of the interviewee made mention of the knowledge and orientation of public relations as a factor limiting the use of public relations by SMEs in Nigeria. Interviewee 1 said,

“There is believe over the years that public relations is a job for the boys. Public relations is something that when big men travel, PR officers arrange their accommodation and travel plan”.

Some the SME owners do not use public relations because they believe it is for large enterprises and it is not as cost effective as social media is cost effective. Some SMEs do not see the need for public relations. Interviewee 8 also made this assertion,

“Some people believe that a company is supposed to exist, and it will grow by itself. Without the accompanied brand that PR adds to it. And what they fail to understand is that the big companies are where they are today because of consistence PR practice.”

In some cases, SMEs owners believe engaging in public relations is a fruitless venture involving financial responsibility. Interviewee 3 observation,

“SMEs where I come from do not appreciate the capacity of the media to play role in promoting themselves or promoting PR or whatever. They do not see the need for media to promoting themselves. They see spending money for public relations especially through the media as a wasteful venture.”

Interviewee 9 who is a journalist, supports interviewee 3 statement, “They are a bit reluctant to open up to coverage. Most times whenever they hear of coverage their minds go to the money. Will I be able to pay for it? Publicity is not free, and it is not cheap either.”

Occasionally, advertisement and social media served as a foil for the use of public relations, for example a respondent, compared the sales made online to the sales made while engaging in public relations. Interviewee 4 also made this assertion,

“A typical businessperson will prefer advert, than paying for a PR services that is the scenario we have here. One common misunderstanding of SME owners in Nigeria is that social media can do all the magic, but it is not true.

Social media need to be combined with other PR strategies for it to be effective”.

What was interesting was that some SMEs believe public relations is solely for Large Enterprises while some are waiting to grow before using public relations, others view it as a reactive tool, interviewee 8 make note of this’ “Nigerians prefer word of mouth marketing rather than PR. Unless their company is in crisis that is when people start thinking about PR per say.”

SMEs owners who are to an extent understand the need for PR, however, do not understand how to pitch their product to the media. Interviewee 9 gives an example, “They have this expectation that if you cover their event, then the story you produce have to be event base, you have to mention them throughout the piece.”

The public relations experts are of the opinion that public relations cannot play a role in the growth of SMEs except there are educated and understand the importance of PR. According to Interviewee 4, “PR can raise the profile of SMEs provided there is a reorientation”. Interviewee 3 also agrees with Interviewee 4, “there is need for those engage in SMEs to be enlightened about what PR is and how key it is in terms of protecting and promoting the image of an outfit and the growth of their business.”

The findings from this study indicates that there is unethical practices of PR in the country and this into feeds into public relations as a practice. A recurring theme discussed by interviewees, unethical practice of journalism and public relations. Interviewee 3 explains the duty of the NIPR “We have a governing body of public relations, NIPR. This body is like a union of PR practitioners who have given themselves the superior duty of sanctioning the practice of the profession. Trying to demarcate the scope of the operation of PR as well as to set parameter for ethical code of conduct”.

Interviewee 10 explains how public relations is handled by media organizations, “There is what we call LTP in the media industry. It means Lets Them Pay. So, if you bring something that is PR related, the media organization will not run it for free. Because it is something, we are doing for your own advantage, so you have to pay for it.” Similarly, interviewee 7 explains how unethical practice hinder SME public relations in Nigeria, “when it comes to media relations and you have to pay. Some do, but I personally think it is not ethical. I have worked

for places where we did not pay, we told our story and people came to cover us. Some people think they have to pay to get their story out there which is not true, because again, the internet, and social media have made things easier so you can put your own story out there and tell your own story.”

Interviewee 4 agrees that the ‘Let Them Pay’ exist within media outlets, “The ‘let them pay factor’ is there but there are programmes that do not require you paying a dime. These opportunities are few but as an SME you need to leverage on it.”

Interviewee 8 gives an example from experience,

“I used to work with a FinTech organization. it is a medium scale enterprise, when we wanted to do our corporate launch, we invited a lot of Banks and Stakeholders within the industry. So ordinarily, you will expect that when we called the press, they will come. It doesn’t what that way in Nigeria. In fact, if you have discovered a ground-breaking research in Nigeria, you have to pay the media to come and cover it”.

The issue of paying for coverage is an additional challenge to SMEs engaging in public relation. Interviewee 3 noted “Because the media do not operate in a vacuum. They operate in line with the expectation of the environment, they run the activities with how much they can make profit. If you want to promote yourself, you have to pay. Fortunately, the large-scale enterprises have the capacity of sponsoring PR through the media”.

Interviewee 10, a journalist explained that when reporting on an SME, there is usually a suspicion on financed stories, “You might have an interest to go to an SME setting to report their issue to the society to understand their services and their worry. When you bring such story to the station, there is always this suspicion that since the story is from a business organization, it must have been financed. So, there is this challenge of convincing your editor that this is a human-interest story”.

To follow up, Interview 10 was asked if SMEs coming to speak on a talk show will have to pay. The reply implies that SMEs are expected to pay, “Before you begin to bring an SME owner to a programme on the radio. It is going to be a situation where the SME owner is bringing something to the table because it is a businessman coming to a business organization. So, it

is either the station is going to get some benefit to bringing you on the station or you are going to pay some benefit to the station”

However, it is important to note that in some cases the SMEs are not required to pay. In cases concerning government policies affecting SMEs, the media houses report such issues free.

“If the challenge of the SMEs has become a national cry, that could a window of opportunity for any of the SME to be invited to come and speak on what they want the government to do. But if it is a normal situation that an SME just want to raise an issue. Then, I bet you, in any normal media system in Nigeria, the person will be required to bring something to the table” (Interview 10).

Interviewee 5, also noted that radio stations are there to make profit, “In this part of the world, If I have a radio station, it is a private radio station. I started the business to make money outside other reasons it is particularly to make money. So, if SMEs want to use the radio for PR, most of those radio won’t give it for free. Except there is a personal recognition between the owner of the radio station and the station”.

To further understand the assertions of the interviewees on unethical practice, the researcher interviewed a member of the NIPR, the interviewee explained that according to code of conduct of the NIPR, it is unethical for professionals to pay for media coverage. He states,

“It is not ethical but the NIPR tend to look away because of the nuances of the media houses. The poverty level is the reason for paying of journalist. The money given to journalist is given for airtime to make calls, data and transport.”

The experts interviewed had worked with SMEs and Large corporations. To answer the second research question, there were asked about the differences in the practice between large enterprises and SMEs, they mentioned several themes.

One theme mentioned was the organization public relation objective. The interviewee acknowledged that the objective of public relations activity in large enterprise is to maintain their image while SMEs are focused on image building. Some responses:

“It is just that SMEs are unique, you might have to do more work than to say if it is a well-known brand. Your PR will take a different approach, your PR will not be about getting customers or getting your name out there. In that case, your PR will most likely be about maintaining your brand, making sure that customer service is going on well and making sure that your stakeholders know what is happening.” (Interviewee 7)

“For SMEs most of the time it is about how do we get out there, how do we get people to know what we are about, how do we get people to know us so that they that us seriously”. (Interviewee 2)

The second theme noticed was the scope and media coverage. The media coverage of SMEs is quite different from that of large enterprises as Interviewee 1 specifically explain,

“If you take a big organization, Dangote, realize that there is a big market for petroleum product in the country and they respond to that. There are other ways, the Nigerian elite hardly watch the local channels so what have the organization done, they carried their public relations to CNN, al Jazeera and so on. So that is their focus, but as a small organization, you may not necessarily do what Dangote have done but you could create a local market using local media.”

The journalists interviewed explain in terms of coverage, says, “SMEs have small financial basis and their profit margin are not as high as the large enterprise so they will not invest much to advertise or do public relations. so obviously don’t get as much media coverage as their larger counterpart.” (interviewee 10)

The third theme that occurred was in terms of structure and finance. The financial capabilities were mentioned by most of the interviewees. According to Interviewee 6, the resources and funds are not the same. Using the same strategies might not work for all businesses.

“In terms of resources and funds they are not the same. So, you want to work and capitalize on what will work for you as an SME. What will work for you as an SME might not be what will work for a large corporation. You might not need a larger base like large organization in terms of your PR.” SME public relations are handled informally by the owner. (Interviewee 6).

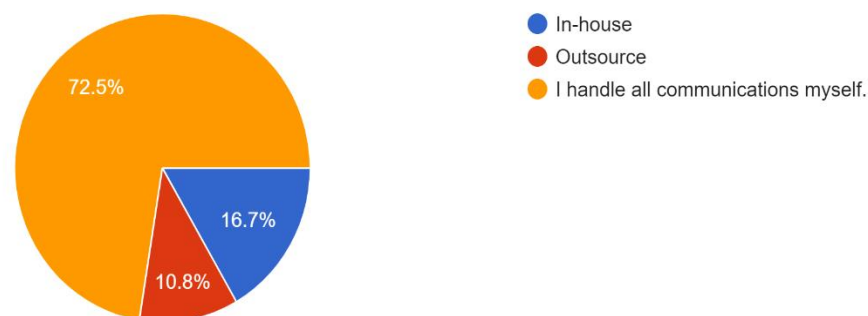
Interviewee 3 explain that large enterprises have designated departments that handles public relations while SMEs “do it casually, they do it informally and because of this enterprises are not as organized as this large scale enterprises, they lack the finance to hire a consultant, they use they own intuition and employ of their own kind of PR the best way they know how they can do it.”

From the questionnaire result, most SME owners/managers indicate they handle all communications themselves. the result is illustrated in the pie chart below (figure 2). It shows that about 87 (72.5%), 20 (16.7%) have an in-house public relations expert while 13 (10.8%) outsourced experts.

Figure 2: Structure of organization

Do you outsource public relations, or do you have an inhouse public relations officer?

120 responses



To understand what structure works better, journalist interviewed were asked if they prefer getting press releases and pitches from business owners or experts, they all showed more interest in working with public relations consultants. As interviewee 10 puts it,

“it is always better to get it from a PR person because some SME people are not educated in the communication of the media, how issues are presented how you could project your interest, the point you want to make, the point you want make and the selling point you want to put out there for the target audience”.

Interviewee 9 explained the reason for this preference,

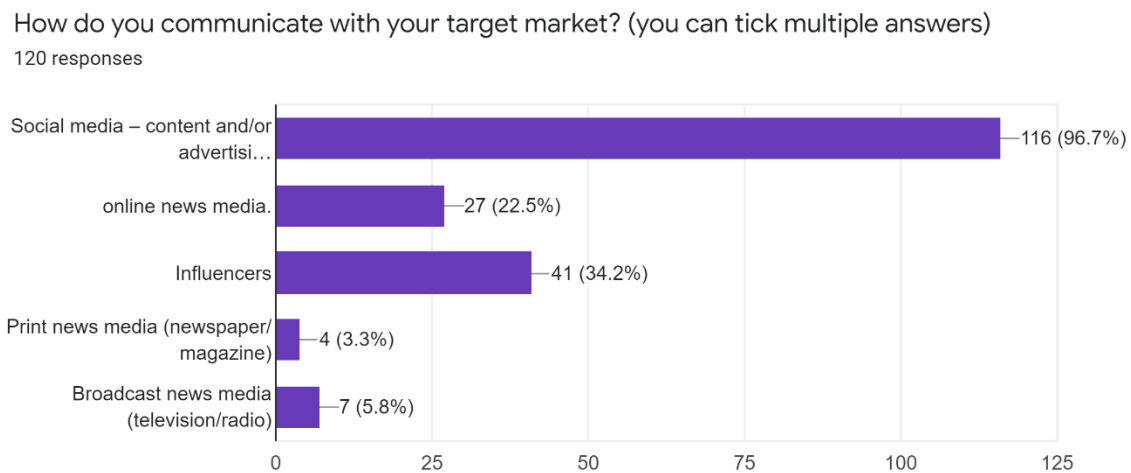
“I have received pitches from PR expert and Businesses themselves. But the PR firms are able to find story better than the business themselves.

When I receive from business owners, there are usually all over the place no story to say. So, it is more work for me to try and locate a news spec that is publishable”.

SMEs were asked strategies they use to promote their businesses. The responses reveal that SMEs prefer to the use of advertisement, word of mouth and social media than the use of public relations. More responses can be reviewed in Appendix

The SMEs were also asked the media tool they use for their public relations activities, As evidenced from the graph, the most used public relations channel by SMEs. the result show that SMEs prefer the use of social media than traditional media. This could be because there handle their public relations activities themselves as seen in Figure 2. In the open ended question, a respondents states that “It’s the new technology and it reaches the public faster.” 96.7% of SMEs use social media to communicate with their public followed by 34.2% who use influencers, 27% use online news media, 7% use broadcast news media while 4% use the print media. The result is showed in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Media Use



As part of the objective of the study is to determine the effective public relations strategies for SMEs. Interviewees were asked if SMEs can use the same strategies as the big businesses. About 75% (6 out of 8) of the public relations consultant and academics interviewed are of the opinion that SMEs can adopt the same practice as large enterprises. The interview responses show that the tools are the same. Some of the responses.

“It is the same tools with large organization. Just bring them to your level.”

“SMEs can use the same strategy, but it has to be in smaller scale”.

“We are in what we call global village and not just that every practice can be reduce to it smallest form. PR strategies and tools are the same all over the world. The difference is that some are practice at a larger scale while some are reduced to your own level. To the level at which you can afford to do it.”

Interviewee were asked the right strategies for SMEs to raise their profile. The interviewees mentioned strategies they believe is effective for SMEs in Nigeria. Some of the strategies and tools that reoccurred in most of the interview includes i) Networking and Events, ii) leveraging on the media iii) partnership and sponsorship, iv) community relations and v) corporate social responsibility.

i) Networking and Events: Networking was identified by respondents as a strategy that effective for SMEs to grow. Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 10 commented respectively:

“Those working in the same segment, can get together and that corporation will enable them to be relevant in the market. if you can corporate and work together it is easier to work together and force yourself into the market to remain relevant.”

“if they operate individual that will be impossible. Because the large enterprises are big and can brush it off with anybody. So the best way they can ever come close is if they operate in synergy where various SMEs who maybe operate the same kind of business in a particular area could come together and harness fund and going to the media to announce their presence in that type of business but if they go solo it will be very difficult to compete.”

Relatively, organizing events appeared as a recurring strategy mentioned by interviewees. Interviewees stressed on SMEs organizing and attending events to increase visibility of SMEs. Interviewee 9 explains, “interact more because most times it is through interactions you get to know what people are doing, you have not attended events or exhibition and you have not

made effort to improve your visibility then nobody gets to know you. You will just depend on word of mouth, which is fine, but you have to go beyond what we call a subsistence SME.”

Interviewee 4 adds, “it is important that an SME owner, you participate in business events. It is very important. There are shows they organize, try to show your face in such event. If you cannot organize it in your own small ways, join an activity that allows you to showcase your products. Business events is one thing that works for us here”.

ii) The use of traditional media: The use of traditional media is evidenced in the responses of the interviewee. They responded,

“something that I have found that works efficiently is the use of radio and digital awareness.”

“Like I said if you have opportunity of appearing on any of the conventional media whether radio or television is a very good strategy. and for small scale, you might not have access to the national media because of cost but if opportunity show itself, you cash in on it.”

The journalist interviewed demonstrated how SMEs can attract media attention. In order to get the media’s attention, SMEs need to be innovative when presenting their products/services. When asked what they look at for before reporting on an SME, Interviewee 9 explained, “I look out for uniqueness, innovation, evidence, something that is reachable in a way and it is relevant to the immediate audience and something that lends itself to be expanded beyond one business”.

Additionally, stories that are human interest focus are covered. Interviewee 10 explains this concept, “if an SME is organizing an activity that has a human-interest angle, there is possibility of me bringing the report from that angle without outrightly presenting the business organization. I could report on that”. However, SMEs have to be very strategic when being innovative, Interviewee 7 noted, “if your company deal with product and services where you have something that is not in the norm in the country that you are in, you will have an additional job of getting people to see the value”.

iii) Partnership and sponsorship: A theme that recur between interviewees was partnership and sponsorship. Interviewee 4 noted, “works here in Nigeria. You do not have to do it big. In

your community there are events that you will make one or two contributions to. It might not be cash”.

Interviewee 10 gives an example, “Sometimes media houses go into partnership with SMEs. then they might be a better type of arrangement where the media gives them presence by airing their brands and product while there in turn promote the media organization by doing giveaways maybe giving out some of their products as prizes during the media programme where you need the audience to participate where you will win a prize. A business organization might decide to give out their product. It may even be a free launch type of arrangement with your loved ones.”

iv) Two-way communication: SMEs encouraging feedback from the community is a strategy that is emphasized by the interviewees. Interviewee 4 explains,

“one way It works well is getting influencers in communities. Sometimes they could be community leaders or youth leaders. You get influencers, sell your business. Sometimes you share the support you think you will need for your business with them and it works because, they are community influencers and they help you pull crowd to your business. I have seen it worked and we love family setting”.

The interviewee gives an example, “I know of a business, the man does chicken BBQ and what he does is ones a while he calls his customer and ask about them and appreciate they patronage and that have kept us. A boss of mine buys that BBQ every day for his staff and buys from that business owner because of his communication skills. there is a two-way communication that allows feedback for brand improvement and ensures customer loyalty.”

Interviewee 1 explained the benefit of community relation, “interpersonal relations is important because in the local communities, people believe in individuals more than the large enterprises”.

v) Corporate Social Responsibility: As stated by Lim and Greenwood (2017), CSR initiatives helps to bolster an organization’s image. All interviewees agree that CSR is an efficient strategy for SMEs. Interestingly, not all SMEs in Nigeria engage in CSR and those who engage do not see CSR a public relations strategy. Respondents were asked why they engage in CSR.

Responses show that most SMEs unlike the large corporate engage in CSR to give back to the community and do not think of it as a public relations activity/strategy. Respondents commented:

“Because I want to make a change in the lives of those with few or no resources”

“It's a platform to evaluate the growth and impact my services are having on the general public.”

To help young girls who can't afford to go to the University. It's a way of giving our quota to the society.

“Because I like to give back to the society and make people happy the little way I can”

“I engaged in CSR since I believe it is my duty to be a good citizen and do the right thing”

The interviewees on the other hand support Lim and Greenwood (2017), noting that CSR is an effective way for SMEs to build their profile. Interviewee 4 gives an example of effective CSR activity, “organization come out to carry out sanitation activities with their t-shirts and p-caps and people asks questions about them. it is one way of showcasing your business and you win the heart of people especially in developing countries like Nigeria.”

Interviewee 3 noted that in the north east, a place affected by insurgency, “whenever there is calamity, especially now that people are ravage this insurgency of boko haram, you see a lot of SME engaging in aid to the people. All these are ways to appeal to the sensitivity of the people to give them a sense of belonging and participation, so they try to convey items to people that have been affected by the insurgency”.

Another example by interviewee 5 and interviewee 6 is training and empowerment of individuals in the community. All interviewees agree that CSR is an efficient strategy for SMEs. Interestingly, not all SMEs in Nigeria engage in CSR and those who engage do not see CSR a public relations strategy.

Questionnaire respondents were asked the type of CSR they engage in. Mentions that came up were, donating to charity, training activities and volunteering in social activities. The findings from this question are in line with ISME (2015) survey of SME CSR activities such as

activities by voluntarily contributing to charities. The result show that SMEs in Nigeria engage more in skill acquisition and development.

According to Freitag and Stokes (2009), public relations practices vary by geographical location and from culture to culture. The findings from this research supports Freitag and Stokes assertion. Some findings differ between locations. Interviewee from more rural settings emphasized the use of community and interpersonal relations whereas interviewees from Lagos and Abuja placed more importance on the use of social media and television. Interviewee 3 explained and give example, "People that engage in SME PR tailor it to our cultural environment around here. They follow the tail of their clientele. They attend naming ceremony, they attend their weddings, they make sure they invite them to their functions. Around here in the north east people place premium on such things and it promotes the business. Sometimes, producers of table water go to the extent of providing free drinking waters at occasion. So, these are the kind of things they engage in do and most occasionally, what they do is they try to create rapport, they personalize their clientele". SMEs in such area as Interviewee 3 engage in informal public relations activity, "Most of them try to emphasis interpersonal contact, they try to sustain and maintain their public through contact by participating in their activities, because you know in the north eastern part of this country, we are very cordial and this is what we respect. If someone finds himself in a fold of a family unit, either through his effort to make profit or become part of the family, I think he gains acceptance so I wouldn't want to submit that SMEs around here engage in formal public relations activities. I would like to call it an appropriate PR strategy, a PR pattern that is only suited for this terrain" (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 2 noted, "while communicating in remote area, radio is the best"

The diversity and exposure of the people seems to be a determinant when planning public relations activities. Interviewee 7 noted "the way we communicate certain things in Lagos or Abuja, is different from how you communicate with people from other states that are not as exposed and may not have as much as global influence. So within the country certain city might have their own nuance so the first thing I will say is where you are communicating, what is important for the people there because that will most likely influence whatever strategy you are". This finding supports Varjee et al. (2019) claim which indicates that an

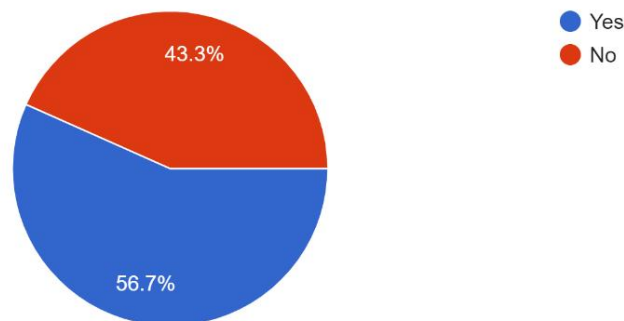
acceptable public relations strategy in some parts of the country might have drawbacks elsewhere.

Many of the interviewees believe that the external business environment affects public relations practices of SMEs. Interviewee 7 explains, “if it an industry that is heavily regulated, whatever the business climate is might affect the communication and how you do business”. Interviewee 3, noted that SMEs “have been able to tailor their public relations activities to suit the understanding, perception and aspiration of their public in terms of their socio-cultural and economic environment.” The diversity of the people is a major determinant for public relations activities and practice. Interviewee 8 explained “Nigeria is very diverse, and the nature of your business will sometimes determine your willingness to accept PR activity or otherwise”.

Questions were asked in the questionnaire to determine whether the environment of SMEs affect their communication strategy, 56.7% answered Yes to the question and 43.3 answered no. The finding supports Molleda (2008) claim that the socio-cultural and economic environment of the Nigeria have made it difficult to develop effective public relations strategies.

Figure 4: Environmental Factor

Do the cultural and religious environment determine how you communicate with your customers?
120 responses



In an open-ended question, respondents were asked the challenges they face in communicating with their target market. Some issues regarding the external business environment were raised. Issues of finance, competitors and Literacy were the most mentioned. Some commented:

“The financial implications are on the high side to SMEs.”

“Finding the specific product preference for each demographic target audience and what approach to use to get and retain the attention of my target consumer.”

“Competitive market”

“Apart from big corporations and price advantage they have, there are a lot of smaller businesses.”

“Costs too high for mainstream media”

“Illiteracy”

“Choosing the right audience, ensuring the product is appealing.”

“We have to pay too much to cover a wider reach.”

“When I make use of influencers to promote my business, I do not get the sales I intend on getting as they do not drive the traffic, I assumed they would drive to my brand”.

This question is asked to understand how the environment SMEs operate affect their communication. These environmental factors to an extends could serve as advantage for

SMEs to get coverage in the media. Interviewee 9 explained, “We could come and present the cry of the SMEs to the government that this is what the SMEs are going through. We do this because we recognise the fact that the SMEs are key segment of the society”.

4.4 Conclusion

The primary aim of this research was to ascertain if SMEs in developing countries can use public relations to raise their profile. The scope of the research is Nigeria. The analysis found that public relations can have positive impact to the growth of SMEs in Nigeria, however, there are factors that are limiting the use of PR by SMEs.

The use of public relations is instrumental to the image building and breaking into the market for SMEs. In the analysis of results, a few themes emerged. The analysis revealed that SME knowledge and orientation of public relation is low. Public relation is not seen as a tool for SMEs to grow. It is believed to be expensive and a tool for large enterprises. Within some SME, public relations is regarded as an informal activity and is not planned. The finding is also linked to the ethics and regulations of public relations in Nigeria. The results show that there appear to be unethical practices within professionals. This finding is narrowed down to the media professionals receiving a bribe to publish some stories. The unscrupulous practise is a limitation to the public relations practice in the country. There is some discrepancy in the strategies of large enterprises and that SMEs. The large enterprises engage in strategies that are focus on maintaining reputation, whereas SMEs are more focused on image building and brand awareness.

Interestingly, the findings show that the environment SMEs operate to determine their public relations strategies and tools. Their financial strength limits SMEs public relations. The socio-cultural environment plays a role in public relations of SMEs.

Several strategies were recommended to be used by SMEs, considering the environment and financial strength. Public relations strategies such as networking, corporate social responsibility and community relations are themes that recur in the findings discussing involving strategies. The next chapter is a detailed discussion of the key findings of the study and what they mean to the SME and PR sector in Nigeria.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Overview:

In relations to the data analysed in the previous chapter. The findings answer the research question and shows that there is a link between the use of public relations and the growth of SMEs in Nigeria. There are three key themes that answer the research questions of this study. The themes included: a) Two-way communication, b) Understanding the function of PR and c) Ethics and regulations of industry.

5.2 Two-way communication

The research findings showed themes validating the use of public relations for the growth of SMEs. The interviewee all identified image building as the key role of public relations in the growth of SMEs in Nigeria. Another role public relation is building build public confidence through enhancing two-way communications between the organization and its public. The findings correspond with Huang-Horowitz and Evans (2017) claim that small enterprises use strategic communication to build brand identity and organization values. Evidence indicate that by using public relations, SMEs can stand out and build their brand awareness.

The findings show that SMEs in Nigeria prefer Social Media for their public relations. the result show that SMEs prefer the use of social media than traditional media. This could be because they handle their public relations activities themselves. A second reason it is cost effective. For example, one respondent stated: "It's the new technology and it reaches the public faster." This finding relates to Soylu (2018) claim SMEs use online media to enable two-way communication and this in turn increases customer satisfaction.

The elements that distinguish SMEs from large enterprises are organization objectives, media coverage, structure and finance are the major factors that distinguished the strategies of large enterprises and SMEs. In contrast to the big businesses, SMEs organization objectives are focus on survival while the big businesses are geared toward relationship management and managing reputation. In terms of financial capabilities and resources, large enterprises tend to have a more structured approach towards public relations and have an upper hand in terms of finance. Consequently, they can engage in international public relations while SMEs stick to the local media.

Eniola and Entebang (2015) study indicated that the challenges SMEs in Nigeria face is inadequate financial support and challenging business environment. The findings from this study is evidenced that notwithstanding these challenges, the SME sector in the country can grow. The result show that public relations is a cost-effective means for SMEs to raise their profile. The interviewees had different opinions on the strategies SMEs in Nigeria can use to build their brands. However, there some strategies themes that recur including networking and events, partnership and sponsorship, the use of conventional media, community relations, and corporate social responsibility. To be able to compete favourably in the market SMEs are advised to work in synergy with others in the same industry, that way, they can earn media coverage such as the large enterprises. The findings demonstrate that there are solid benefits for SMEs to use the media to generate awareness and public confidence.

The PR literature indicate that public relations strategies differ based on political and cultural environment. (Vercic et al. 2013). Interestingly, the diversity of the people plays a huge role in determining the public relations strategies of SMEs. The respondents agree that the religious and cultural environment they operate determine their communication strategy. Base on location, there were some discrepancy in public relations strategies. Interviewee from more rural settings emphasized the use of community and interpersonal relations whereas interviewees from Lagos and Abuja placed more emphasis on the use of social media and television. The emphasis on placed on community relations in the rural setting could be as result of low technological advancement that is indicated in Abeh (2017) research that the high level of poverty makes it difficult for SMEs to afford basic technological gadgets.

Public relations activities in the country is channelled to suit the perception of their SME public in terms of their socio-cultural and economic environment. Interviewees from the north eastern part of the country, demonstrate that the most effective strategy for SMEs in that region is through community relations and CSR as the public place value and trust in interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, in places like Lagos and Abuja, where the public are more exposed and have more global influence, public relations tools such as social media and website are recommended.

5.3 Understanding of the Function of PR

A central theme in these discussions is the understanding of the function of PR . SMEs in this study generally do not understand the critical role of public relations. While a huge

percentage of respondents agree that public relations is important for the growth of their business, the responses from the questionnaire and interview on why they do not use public show that there seem to be a lack of understanding of public relations.

What was interesting was that some SMEs believe public relations is solely for Large Enterprises while some are waiting to grow before using public relations. Occasionally, advertisement and social media served as a foil for the use of public relations. SMEs would rather focus on online sales, word of mouth and advertising than public relations. SMEs believe that investing in public relations is a fruitless venture that requires financial responsibility. The interviewees identify the fear of media coverage by SMEs is linked to the believe that media coverage is not free.

In some cases, public relations is solely viewed as a reactive tool for crisis management in an organization. The findings from this study indicate that the most efficient way for SMEs to use public relations is as a proactive tool. This issue of knowledge is seen to be a key factor undermining the importance of public relations to businesses. Public relations cannot play a role in the growth of SMEs in Nigeria until SMEs are educated on the importance of public relations and how it should be used.

All interviewees stressed the need for SMEs in developing countries to use public relations to raise the profile. The result indicates that for SMEs or any organization to grow, there is need for consistent use of public relations as proactive tool. There is also an urgent need for SMEs to be enlightened about what PR is and how key it is in terms of protecting and promoting the image of an outfit and the growth of their business.

5.4 Ethics and Regulations of the Industry

The findings from this study indicates that there are unethical practices by some professionals in the country and this into feeds into public relations as a practice. The issue of unscrupulous practice within the profession was a recurring theme discussed by respondents. There exist a 'Let them Pay' factor between the media and public relations sector. The journalist interviewed explained that when any PR relations pitch is brought to a media house, there is a requirement to pay to get the story featured.

While some public relations professionals insist that it is an unethical practice that should not be condone, other practitioners pay just to get covered. Paying for coverage is an additional

challenge to SMEs engaging in public relation. Consequently, large-scale enterprises are feature more in the media because they have the financial strength. This finding further reinforces Abeh (2017) assertion that low funding, business ethics and corruption remain areas of concern for the growth of SMEs in the country.

A journalist explains that part of the challenges of reporting on SMEs, is the suspicion by Editors that each business-related story is paid for. The findings also indicate that before SMEs are invited to media houses for interview, there must contribute something to the station. An interviewee puts it,

“It is going to be a situation where the SME owner is bringing something to the table because it is a businessman coming to a business organization. So, it is either the station is going to get some benefit to bringing you on the station or you are going to pay some benefit to the station”.

However, it is important to note that in some cases the SMEs are not required to pay. An example includes cases concerning government policies that are affecting SMEs, the media houses report such issues free. To further understand the claim of the interviewees on unethical practice, the researcher interviewed a member of the NIPR, the interviewee explained that according to code of conduct of the NIPR, it is unethical for professionals to pay for media coverage.

Further research is required into the unofficial practice of ‘Let them Pay’. The reality is that as the industry grows and evolves in Nigeria, a more stringent adherence to standards of practice might be required and the NIPR would have a role in this.

5.5 Recommendations:

Literature on SMEs in developing countries is sparse. This study provides important information that are relevant public relations professionals and small business owners. The study fills the knowledge gap by effective strategies for the growth of SMEs in developing countries.

This research is of benefits to public relations practitioners and small business owners as it demonstrates effective public relations for small businesses in developing countries and factors limiting the practice of public relations. It demonstrated the strategies SMEs use to raise their profile depending on their environment. The findings of this study provide insights

for public relations professionals working with small businesses on how they can strategically build the image of SMEs in Nigeria. For international communication practitioners, the study gives insight SME sector and its environment in Nigeria.

Based on the findings of the study, SMEs in Nigeria need to be educated on the role of public relations to their business. Public Relations can raise the profile of SMEs in Nigeria provided there is a reorientation. The more they identify its role, the higher the chances of it playing a role in promoting their business. SMEs need to find more innovative ways to get covered by the media. It is important that they channel their public relations activity to fit the socio-cultural terrain and perception of the environment at which they operate. SMEs can, however, adopt the public relations strategies of large enterprises but they need to do this in a smaller scale. The public relations sector in Nigeria, on the other hand, needs to be properly regulated. NIPR needs to address the issue of unethical PR practice in the country as it is limiting the practice of public relations by SMEs in the country. Media features or news should not be paid for.

The study had few limitations. Future research in this area should note these limitations. The researcher interviewed 10 professionals and designed a questionnaire for SMEs. The result provided generalized themes for the study. With an extended period, there would have been more interviews, and a focus group would have been conducted before designing a survey for more SME owners. Further studies under the topic of SMEs in developing countries and Public relations could use a case study method to further verify the findings of this research. If time had allowed, I would have conducted a more detailed research on strategies based on Industries and examine if the same public relations strategy applies to all industries. Specific topics such as change management and internal communication of SMEs can be explored.

5.6 Conclusion

Public relations can help raise the profile of SMEs in Nigeria. SMEs can use strategies and tools such as community relation, CSR, and local media. They need to ensure that there is an avenue for feedback between their organization and the public. SMEs can adopt the public relations strategies of large enterprises; however, these strategies can be done in a smaller scale and it must align with the socio-cultural terrain where the SME operates.

The potential of public relations is undermined by the lack of understanding of SMEs towards public relations. There is need for SME education on the role and importance of public

relations to the growth of SMEs in Nigeria. The SME need to consistently use public relations not just as a reactive measure but as a proactive business tool.

Another issue that feeds into the public relations practice of the country, is unethical practice by practitioners. The National Institute of Public Relation (NIPR) is advised to investigate it. As public relations should not be paid for. The 'Let them Pay' factor of the media in Nigeria is restricting the public relations practices of SME.

This study fills the gap in knowledge on the public relations strategies of SMEs in Nigeria. it is recommended the small business owners incorporate public relation in their business to help raise their profile. The study provide insight to PR consultant working with SMEs on cost-effective public relations strategies for small businesses in the country.

Further studies under the topic of SMEs in developing countries and Public relations could use a case study method to further verify the findings of this research. If time had allowed, I would have conducted a more detailed research on strategies base on Industries and examine if the same public relations strategy applies to all industries. Specific topics such as change management and internal communication of SMEs can be explored.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Small medium scale enterprises are vital to the growth of nations economy. SMEs represent 99% of firms in Nigeria. They contribute to over 48% of the country's GDP and 50% of industrial employments. Research indicate that new SMEs are emerging in the country however, limiting external factors such as government policies, insufficient finance, and the cultural factors that leads to their decline. In developed economies, SMEs frequently use public relations informal manner and public relations activities are usually handled by the business owners. There employ strategies such as charity activities and registration for awards. However, evidence have shown that public relations strategies differ according to geographical and cultural environment, there is evidence that there are some public relations tools remain the same in every environment. PR predominantly has been used in Nigeria for political endeavours and big businesses. However, there remain opportunity for SMEs in Nigeria to use PR to grow their businesses based on the activities of SMEs in other countries.

This research aimed to determine whether the use public relations by SMEs in Nigeria could help raise their profile. The research also set out to explore if small businesses can adopt public relations practices of large enterprises. To analyse this research questions, the study used mixed method research combining quantitative and qualitative research to answer the research questions. An analytical survey was design was used. A total of 120 SME owners/managers in Nigeria were surveyed using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was unsupervised and distributed online using Google form. The objective was to explore the PR practices of SMEs and factors that limit the practice of public relations. Respondents were asked on how they use public relations to promote their businesses, the public relations tools they continuously use, and challenges they face in their public relations practices. An interview was conducted with a total of 10 respondents. Four PR experts and Four PR professors answered questions on how SMEs can handle the challenges stated by respondents in the questionnaire. Questions such as if the business environment affect SMEs public relations and whether SMEs can use the same PR strategies as large enterprises to favourably compete in the market, were also answered by interviewees. Two journalists were also interviewed, questions were asked on how SMEs could get more coverage in the media.

The findings from the research show that there is an opportunity for SMEs raise their profile using public relations and there is an opportunity for SMEs in Nigeria to use the PR tools being used by larger enterprises and by smaller enterprises elsewhere to grow their businesses. However, these opportunities are being affected by the geographic location in which they operate, the understanding of the public relations available within the SME sector and by lack of adherence to codes of practice for the PR industry in Nigeria.

The use of public relations is instrumental to the image building and breaking into the market by small businesses. The analysis revealed that SME knowledge and orientation of public relation is low. Public relation is not seen as a tool for SMEs to grow. It is believed to be expensive and a tool for large enterprises. Within some SME, public relations is regarded as an informal activity and is not planned. Interestingly, the findings show that the environment SMEs operate to determine their public relations strategies and tools. Their financial strength limits SMEs public relations. The socio-cultural environment plays a role in public relations of SMEs. Several tools are recommended to be used by SMEs, considering the environment and their financial strength. Public relations strategies such as networking, corporate social responsibility and community relations are themes that recur in the findings discussing involving strategies.

The finding is also linked to the ethics and regulations of public relations in Nigeria. The results show that there appear to be unethical practices within the profession. This is narrowed down to the media professionals receiving a bribe to publish some stories. The unscrupulous practise is a limitation to the public relations practice in the country. There is some discrepancy in the strategies of large enterprises and that SMEs. The large enterprises engage in strategies that are focus on maintaining reputation, whereas SMEs are more focused on image building and brand awareness.

All ethical concerns were addressed throughout the research. Some identifiable limitations of the study include the data collection tools, respondent's participation and the timeframe of the study. With an extended period, the challenges would have been minimised, and there would have been more interviews, and a focus group would have been conducted before designing a survey for more SME owners. Future research in this area should note these limitations. The researcher interviewed 10 professionals and design a questionnaire for SMEs. The result provided generalized themes for the study. With an extended period, there would

have been more interviews, and a focus group would have been conducted before designing a survey for more SME owners.

This research is of benefit to small business owners and public relations practitioners as it provides an insight on the public relations practices of SMEs in Nigeria. It demonstrates the cost-effective public relations tools for SMEs such as community relation, CSR, and local media. It also identifies the factors that affect public relations practice in the country.

Further studies under the topic of SMEs in developing countries and Public relations could use a case study approach by observing a specific SMEs to further verify the findings of this research. If time had allowed, I would have conducted a more detailed research on strategies base on Industries and examine if the same public relations strategy applies to all industries. Specific topics such as change management and internal communication of SMEs can be explored. Furthermore, research is required into the unofficial practice of 'Let them Pay'. The reality as the public relations industry grows and evolves in Nigeria, a more stringent adherence to standards of practice might be required.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire

Section A

1. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
2. Do you own or manage a SME?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Section B

3. How many employees do you have?
 - a. 0-10
 - b. 11-20
 - c. 21-30
 - d. 31-40
 - e. 41-50
4. How often do you use public relations to promote your business?
 - a. Always
 - b. Rarely
 - c. Never

5. Do you outsource PR, or do you have an inhouse public relations officer?
 - a. In-house
 - b. Outsource
 - c. I handle all communications myself.
6. How important is Public relations to the growth of the business?
 - a. Important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Not important.
7. How do you launch new products? (List as many as ways as you can)
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
8. How do you communicate with your target market? (you can tick multiple answers)
 - a. Social media
 - b. Word-of-mouth
 - c. Print media
 - d. Broadcast media

e. Influencers

9. Do you engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR)?

a. Yes

b. No

10. what type of CSR do you engage in?

.....

11. Why do you engage in CSR?

.....

12. Do the cultural and religious environment determine how you communicate with your customers?

a. Yes

b. No

13. What are the challenges do you face when publicising your business?

a.

b.

c.

Appendix II – Interview Questions (PR experts and Academics)

1. Can PR be used to grow the SMEs?
2. What PR strategy will you recommend for SMEs in developing countries?
3. Can SMEs use the same PR strategies as Large Enterprises in Nigeria?
4. What are the challenges faced when engaging in SME PR?
5. Does the business environment affect SMEs public relations?
6. Can SMEs use the same PR strategies as Large enterprises?
7. Is PR practice in developing countries the same with that of developed countries?
8. What are the best PR campaigns you have seen?
9. How do you help SMEs get earned media coverage?
10. Have you got any predictions for the future of SME PR in developing countries?

Appendix III – Interview Questions (Journalist)

1. Do SMEs get the same coverage as Large enterprises in Nigeria?
2. Why can't SMEs get the same coverage as Large Enterprise?
3. What do SMEs need to do differently to get good public relation, that is, to get into the press like the Large enterprises?
4. How do you determine which SME get covered and what does not get reported?
5. What ways have you seen SMEs get creative to get covered?
6. Would you rather get pitches from public relations experts or from entrepreneurs?
7. What are the challenges you encounter when covering SMEs?

Appendix IV – Consent Form example

CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Hadiza Ibrahim

The study aims to understand how SMEs can raise their profiles using public relations in developing countries. It will examine strategies that SMEs need to cultivate a quality relationship with their public. You will be asked a few questions as a Public Relations Strategist/ Entrepreneur. The interview should last around 20 minutes.

This research will be of benefit to entrepreneurs in both developing and developed countries. The research provides an opportunity to hear from experienced Public Relations strategist on public relations for SMEs. All information will be anonymised, and personal participant information will not be used for any reason. Participants will not be identifiable in any published material. Taking part in this research is voluntary, and there will be no consequences for withdrawing. If you have any questions about this research, please contact hadiza.ibrahim@student.griffith.ie.

- SUPERVISOR: Aoife O'Donnell (aoife.odonnell@griffith.ie)
- The Faculty Research Ethics Committee has approved this project.

Participant Signature _____

Researcher Signature: Hadiza Ibrahim

Appendix V: Information Sheet

Title of Research Study: Effective Public Relations Practice for SMES In Developing Countries:
A Case Study of Nigeria

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear Respondent,

You are invited to take part in a research study to explore the public relations needs of SMEs in developing countries. I would like to interview you as a public relations expert/journalist. This research is part of a Master Thesis in Journalism and Public Relations.

It is important that you understand what the research is about and what you will be expected to do before you decide whether to take part in the study. You will be given this information sheet to hold if you want to take part. You will be asked to sign a consent form, too. You can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without giving a reason. The purpose of the study is to examine how PR can be used to grow SMEs market in developing countries.

You have been chosen because of your experience in working in the media and public relations industry. If you decide to participate, the interview will last about 30 minutes, and will be scheduled to match a time that suit all respondents. You are free to stop the interview at any time without giving a reason.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Each of the interviewee will be assigned a number and the key to real names and organisations will be kept in a password-protected folder. This information will be kept for the duration of the study and destroyed after completion. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information

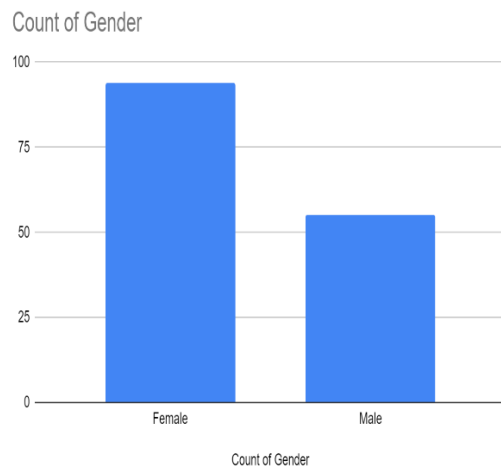
Yours sincerely,

Hadiza Ibrahim

+353899779350

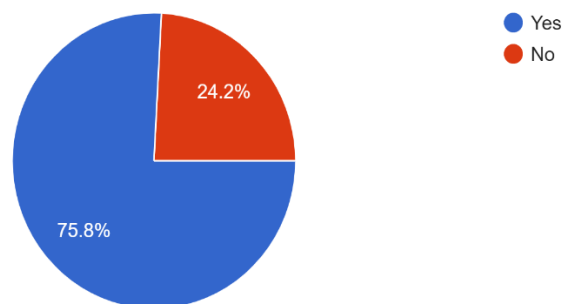
hadiza.ibrahim@student.griffith.ie

APPENDIX VI: QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES



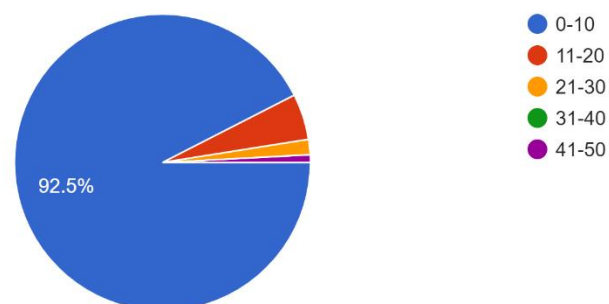
Do you own or manage a Small/Medium Scale Enterprise (business)?

149 responses



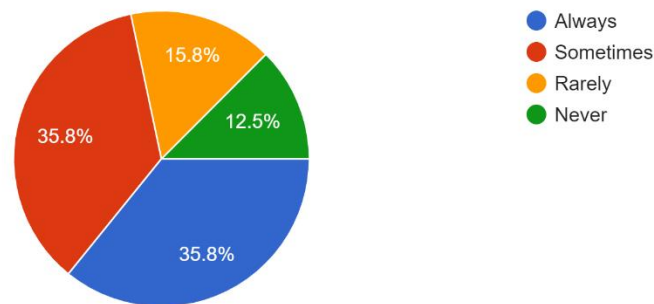
How many employees do you have?

120 responses



How often do you use public relations to promote your business?

120 responses

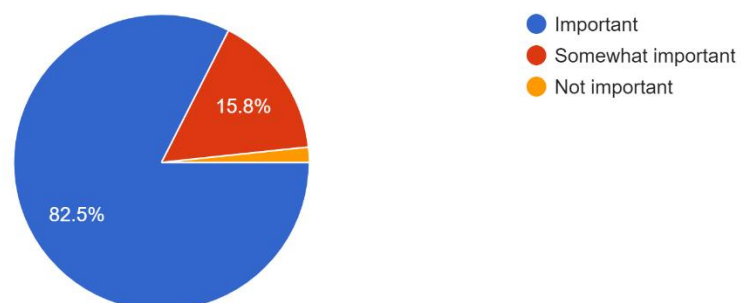


If Never, why? 16 responses

N/A
This is because most sales are moving online now so I can focus in online ads and marketing instead
I don't have a business yet
They are not tech savvy
Never had the opportunity
PR I believe is for very big brands with so many competitors
I didn't know about them
I want to have distributors in every state first
I use Social media platforms. Its the new technology and it reaches the public faster.

How important is Public relations to the growth of the business?

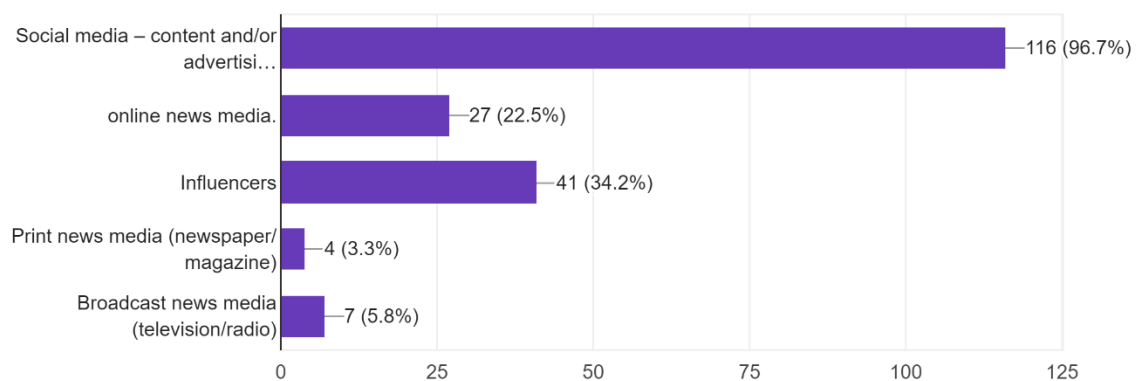
120 responses



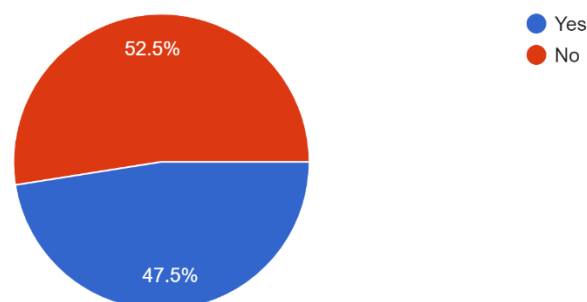
How do you introduce new products to your target market? (List as many ways as you can) 120 responses

Advertising
 Social media
 Social media
 I do sampling Before I go online
 Posting pictures of available products. Feedbacks from those that have patronized also works
 Advertising
 Through ads
 True social media ie facebook, whatsapp status, instagram page, giving out samples to new and regular customer, making awareness of the benefits of the new product in small leaflets.
 Give aways, public relations

How do you communicate with your target market? (you can tick multiple answers)
 120 responses



Do you engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR)?
 120 responses



what type of CSR do you engage in? 52 responses

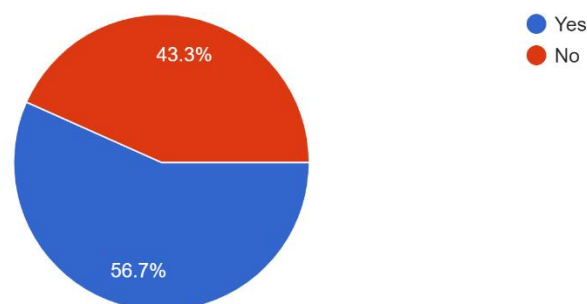
Teaching kids fashion designing at my place.
By engaging our local women and educating them of proper handling and good manufacturing processes. also giving awareness and information on important of our local product.
Rotary club
Volunteering
Helping poor citizens by feeding them
Ethical responsibilities
Poverty eradication
I donate brand new clothes to my community yearly
I go for little charities here and there
Contribution to charity
Taking care of the non previleages
Human Capacity Building, Volunteering.
Provision of basic amenities
Feeding program
Free skills training for the youth ,mostly women.
Donating food items to vulnerable families in times of crisis. Also ,donating food items to less privileged during festivities.
Free baking classes
By engaging the needy and less privilege
My NGO
Women & Youth Free Skills Training
I organise parties for kids at the orphanage
Throwing away my trash appropriately.
Community service
Charity
Collaboration to produce crafted essentials (hats, socks, sweaters etc) for special needs children Free Crafting lessons/training on our YouTube channel using our indigenous languages
We train girls(15-20yrs) who cant afford to go to the University on dressmaking.
Non
Like minds
Its a foundation created to make impact within the society. It could be financially or morally as many as it takes.
Photojournalism
I work with NGO's
NGOs and Charitable organisations
Loyalty rewards

Why do you engage in CSR? 48 responses

It's only right to do so
To impact and make help the kids grow with a sense of responsibility
it gives more value to the final product and to the local women a better price for the raw material
I believe helping others who necessarily cannot pay you back is the best selfless service anyone can engage in and basically is the way forward to changing the world as a whole.
An act of kindness goes a long way.
To add value and give people hope
Being a socially responsible company can bolster company's image and build its brand
To build source of income of the people
Because I like to give back to the society and make people happy the little way I can
I believe a little gesture can make a difference
Cause I love to give back to the society
Doing my little bit to touch lives
Sending them to schools
It's a platform to evaluate the growth and impact my services are having on the general public.
To help the vulnerable
To give back to the community
It's a means of giving back
To give back to the society

Do the cultural and religious environment determine how you communicate with your customers?

120 responses



What are the challenges you face when publicizing your business in the media? 120

responses

People find it difficult to trust me because they can't see me physically and the products worth is really hard to tell from just viewing the picture

When I make use of influencers to promote my business, I do not get the sales I intend on getting as they do not drive the traffic I assumed they would drive to my brand

The financial implications is on the high side to SMEs.

People don't have open minds any more

No challenges

Social media algorithm.. product posts not reaching as much audience as it should

Some people barely pay attention to adverts of small businesses. No enough followers or funds for adequate branding and publicity of my products.

Building brand awareness, measure referrals from social media activity to sale

This depends on the area the society that has the impact on business, the main challenge is the advertising my products .

Finding the specific product preference for each demographic target audience and what approach to use to get and retain the attention of my target consumer.

Not reaching my main target audience sometimes.

Competitive market

Poor network connection

Bad networking,

Literacy, technical know-how

Cost of data

People who open fake account in the name of my business on social media and copy the contents I post on my social media account

Reaching the target audience and capturing their attention enough that they actually interact with the ad/promotion. Apart from big corporations and price advantage they have, there are a lot more small businesses these days which increases the overall competition in social media ad

Promotion fees

Haven't experienced much challenges per say really.

People do not really get to touch and feel the product or taste it. So there is that fear of the unknown and fear of scam. Scammers are all over social media so there is mistrust especially by new clients